Through the Viewfinder by big_slug

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Of the few things Jonathan Byers learned from his father, one especially stuck with him: "The hot end bites you."

Or: Jonathan doesn't like to be photographed.

Through the Viewfinder

Author's Note:

> Ohhhh how long has it been since I posted anything? Guys, it's a process. Getting back into it, not giving up when the slightest hint of writer's block shows its ugly face...
> And look, I don't want to whine or anything, but you'll understand that a cancer scare is not taken lightly. As far as I'm concerned, I was face to face with my own mortality for a while, which does have a sobering effect.
>
> Now let's not dwell on the past when there's this fic. I don't even know why I wrote this, but seeing as I do identify with Jonathan the most out of all ST characters, it kinda makes sense?
> Not gonna lie, this is probably as much a character study of myself as it is of Jonathan. I just find it easier to write stuff like this if I keep a fictional character in mind. I still hope it can entertain you for a few minutes :)

Truly, Lonnie Byers never taught his eldest son much. He wasn‘t around long enough to teach him how to shave, Jonathan - being too embarrassed to ask his mom - having to resort to the old trial and error. Only after several weeks and many bloody nicks was Jonathan confident that he could remove that thin and awkward puberty-stache. Most of the boys at school apparently didn‘t have that problem, at least Jonathan never saw any of them with red spots or band aids on their faces. And when he scratched his own face then, finding a stray hair, all he could think was *‚Lonnie you useless piece of-‘*. Selfish? Perhaps...

In the end, though, what Lonnie *did* teach him stuck, even if his father was insanely hypocritical about most of the ‚values‘ he tried to convey. *„You don‘t lay your hand on a woman, boy. If you do, you might*

as well castrate yourself.“ The fact that this came from a man who would make derogatory comments and yell at his wife almost every night bothered and confused young Jonathan. Then again, he considered his father an example of *how not to do it*, and things worked out for him that way.

One of these lessons, actually one that Lonnie respected himself, was Jonathan‘s daily companion; *„Now, this is the hot end. And the hot end bites you, son, so don‘t point it at yourself.“* Lonnie said these words to eight year old Jonathan, and they naturally referred to his hunting rifle, or really any firearm. While Jonathan went on to hate guns, shooting, in a different sense of the word, would become his number one pastime from the moment his mom picked up the Pentax for him from a yard sale.

It didn‘t go *bang* when it fired, it went *click*. *Click, click, click, click,* all day long, so long as Jonathan had money to buy film. Sometimes he would lie in bed at night, attach a zoom lens, and inspect the ceiling with it through the viewfinder. Not because he wanted to waste film by taking photos of the stains there; Jonathan just loved the cold metal in his hands, the weight of it, the infinitely satisfying mechanics of the advance lever. Not to mention that sound when the mirror flipped. He loved his camera as much as he loved his stereo.

One could say he loved it as much as some people loved their guns. And just like with a gun, he made sure not to point the hot end at himself.

There were few photos of Jonathan in the house. Many photos he had taken, but virtually none he was in. Sometimes he even felt bad about it, the way being photographed made him uncomfortable while he was constantly doing it to anything and anyone that came into view. His mom never minded it, neither did Will.

So really, it was probably just the fact that Jonathan hated seeing his own face. When he went to the bathroom, he would go out of his way to avoid the mirror as it made him cringe. Those baggy second hand shirts that made his arms look like pale twigs, his hair that would always end up greasy within three hours of washing it, that non-haircut. Jonathan didn‘t even have the courage to have it cut some other way.

The hot end of the camera could expose all that, and even worse, could make a permanent record of it. The other end, though... it was enough to hide behind. This block of metal and glass that covered most of Jonathan‘s face. The viewfinder was his window to the world, and like a child fearfully watching a thunderstorm through a crack in the curtains, it would send that familiar chill down his spine.

So was he the creep his peers saw when he got too close to them? Sure he was. Jonathan was the type of person who would stand at a distance, use the lens of his camera as a telescope, watching, pressing the shutter release.

Click, a group of high school seniors drinking milkshakes in a convertible, immortalized on film.

Click, a young woman smiling, watching her boyfriend carve their initials into a bench with his pocket knife.

The things Jonathan missed out on attracted him. He collected them, stored them away in folders loosely sorted by the general theme of the image. And he‘d look at them often, thinking *‚Look what they have... Wouldn‘t it be cool... Wouldn‘t it be cool if I...‘* That didn‘t mean

he could ever hate them, as he was quite aware that nothing but his own lack of courage was holding him back. It wasn‘t their fault. But just *‚look what they have!‘*

It was the summer of 1983 when Jonathan‘s sixteenth birthday rolled around. The old Ford he had saved up for, working the afternoons away, was already standing outside, just waiting for him to pass the driving test the following day. Naturally he didn‘t have any friends over. As far as he knew no one from school even knew when his birthday was. He‘d never had an actual birthday party, and neither had he ever been to one, so Jonathan considered himself blissfully ignorant. He was content with the way his birthday cake was only half as big as originally intended (because his mom had to cut away the charred bits). He found it somewhat funny how all three of them thought they shouldn‘t sit around like that and eat cake when they had just discovered a new roof leak that needed fixing. He snapped a photo of Will with frosting plastered on his face.

And then mom said something like „Oh no, mister, this is *your* birthday. And an important one, too.“ No matter how much Jonathan cringed, trying to wiggle himself out of it, there was no way he could stop her from taking the camera. She knew where to put it, knew how to engage the self timer. So Jonathan was caught in front of the hot end, his skin crawling with the knowledge that his mug would fall victim to the absolute honesty of photographic emulsion.

Of course Jonathan was ultimately the one to develop the film at the lab. He had the roll in hand not three days later, contemplating whether or not he should just rip the film out and tell his mom that he messed up the development. But he *never* messed up film, and besides he had some photos of Chester on there that he wanted to see.

Figuring that he‘d still be able to destroy that one negative later, he set to work. He could do it with his eyes closed, really. Developer. Bleach. Fixer. Stabilizer. All the while the stopwatch ticked.

As he was never really good at judging a photo by the negative alone, he made prints of all of them. Even the one he knew he‘d just throw away later. The one he *believed* he‘d throw away later.

Waiting for the image to show itself, Jonathan couldn’t stop his leg from bobbing. His own face would appear on the paper any second now. He would look at it no matter what. He‘d see it distorted with the discomfort of being caught in front of a camera for once, and he would *remember,* even after ripping the photo to pieces.

But then Jonathan saw the photo, and somehow things changed. Sure, there was him, the part of his face that wasn‘t hidden behind a curtain of greasy hair all scrunched up. But there was also Will with frosting covering his cheeks. There was their mom, slightly blurred because she was just so twitchy all the time.

Just the three of them. *‚Same as it ever was…‘* Jonathan thought. And he also thought *‚Huh… look what I have…‘*

Author's Note:

> Over a month after I posted this, I only now realize that Jonathan's camera, the Pentax K1000, doesn't have a self timer. Ugh, these kinds of inaccuracies somehow really bother me.